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25 May 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Notes on Bundy's Option Paper

1. Attached is the option project description that Mr. Bundy tabled at the Friday, 24 May committee meeting. He asked that we (CIA) prepare draft inputs assessing the probable South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese reactions to each of the five options under consideration. The schedule announced at the 24 May meeting was that all draft inputs would be given to Bundy at our Monday, 27 May meeting, he would prepare a rough total draft (so labelled) that could be circulated and discussed at the 28 May Tuesday lunch. After receiving further guidance and direction from the lunch, the committee would then shake out a final draft to be ready for submission to the President at the end of the week (i. e., around Friday, 31 May).

2. I gather from our telephone conversation in the late afternoon of 24 May that the above schedule has been foreshortened. After you called, I convened [REDACTED] for a bidding review and task levying session. [REDACTED] (OCI) is preparing the draft South Vietnamese assessments, [REDACTED] (ONE), the draft North Vietnamese assessments. These will be circulated and coordinated Monday morning in time for me to meet my commitment to Bundy.

3. All participating in our 24 May session felt that you should be apprised of the draft SNIE on "The Vietnam Situation" (copy attached), which needs a little further tinkering but even in its present form is a good paper accurately reflecting the Agency position.

4. On the general issues raised by the Bundy project:

a. All agreed that none of the options -- i. e., no feasible (non-nuclear) bombing program -- was likely to have an

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appreciable short term effect on Hanoi's military capability to prosecute the war.

b. All agreed that, after only four meetings in Paris, the world at large would find it hard to understand and would be unlikely to support any public manifestation of U.S. impatience. All out resumption of the bombing now would probably be generally read as a sign that the U.S. was not "sincere" about the talks in the first place.

c. The group split sharply over its estimate of the varying effect of the five options on Hanoi's continued presence at the negotiating table. Graham and I (a minority of two) both argued that Hanoi probably wanted to keep the negotiations going for its own reasons and hence, despite bluster and perhaps temporary suspension of the talks or withdrawal from Paris, would probably keep the negotiations going under at least option B and probably E; perhaps not under C; and probably not under D. Hyland was of the strong and well argued opinion that any increase in present bombing patterns (i.e., even B and hence certainly C-E) would make Hanoi break off the talks altogether. The others ranged in between but were more of Hyland's persuasion than Graham's or mine.

d. After considerable discussion and argument we came out about as follows, though these are most accurately reported to you as my views with which I was generally able to get my colleagues to agree and not as a complete consensus:

(1) Hanoi now believes that if it stonewalls long enough, international and domestic political pressure will compel the U.S. to offer some "carrots" (i.e., substantive concessions) to keep the talks from foundering. Any such unreciprocated concessions will have a very adverse effect on South Vietnam, attitudes and opinions -- these being among Hanoi's chief current targets.

(2) Hanoi also probably believes the de-escalatory process enunciated in President Johnson's 31 March speech is, for the U.S. politically irreversible. Hence the policy outlined in (1) involves minimal risk for North Vietnam.

(3) Little real progress is likely to be made in Paris (from our standpoint) unless or until Hanoi is disabused of the notions outlined in (1) and (2) above.

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(4) For maximum mileage from international opinion, the U.S. should probably follow option A for another week or two, to prepare the propaganda ground and let Hanoi's absolute intransigence be unmistakably apparent to everyone willing to recognize facts as facts.

(5) If, as will probably prove to be the case, Hanoi fails to budge during the next week or two (i.e., by mid-June), the U.S. should begin quietly but unambiguously registering its impatience. Some of my colleagues favored a delicately worded private statement by Governor Harriman that was clearly a non-specific ultimatum. I personally am more in favor of starting in a slightly lower key with something like the British gambit we have discussed, then moving to quiet indications to the Soviets, press leaks and finally a defacto ultimatum.

(6) Once the propaganda case has been hammered home and the diplomatic, public opinion ground prepared, a "signal type" turn up of the bombing would probably be politically useful, though it would have a negligible military effect. The majority view here was that the first step should be raids on clearly defined military targets directly (or plausibly) related to expanded activity in the south, e.g., Bai Thuong airfield. If this message did not get through, a further turn of the screw to targets north of the 20th parallel could have further political utility. Again, however, the targets selected should be politically defensible ones.

(7) The group divided sharply over the impact of retaliation-type raids in the north keyed to specific hostile acts in the south such as intense attacks on specific cities. The majority felt these would work against the U.S. in the propaganda field since up to now our public "no advantage" statements have been tied to infiltration rather than southern activity. Graham and I, however, share Emerson's estimate of foolish consistency and believe that surgical retaliatory strikes would be politically useful, particularly in their effect on South Vietnamese attitudes and morale.

SAVA:GACarver:rad

O & 1 - Addressee w/atts

1 - GAC Chrono w/atts

1 - VAS Chrono w/atts

1 - Bundy Ctte. w/atts

1 - Memos to DCI w/atts

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